

Changes to expect as cats age

Many cat lovers would challenge the idea that dogs are “man’s best friend.” Fido’s feline counterparts are incredibly popular as well. According to estimates from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, somewhere between 74 million and 96 million cats are owned in the United States, putting cats on par with dogs — the ASPCA estimates Americans own between 70 million and 80 million dogs.

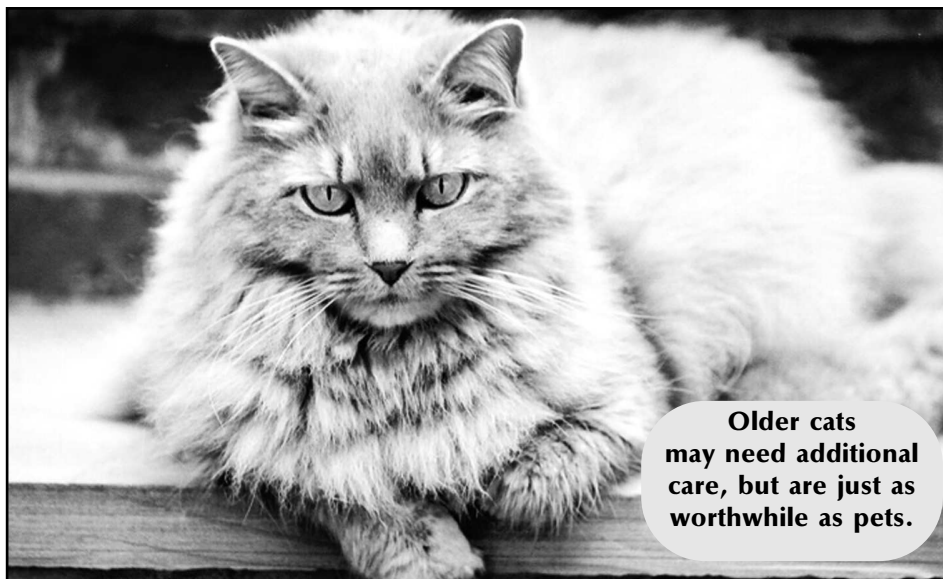
Many prospective pet owners feel that caring for cats must be easier than caring for dogs. Cats do not need daily walks to stay happy and healthy, and many cats do not crave attention as much as their canine counterparts. But caring for cats is not always so simple, especially as cats grow older.

American Association of Feline Practitioners classifies cats into three groups:

- Mature or middle-aged: 7 to 10 years (44 to 56 years for humans)
- Senior: 11 to 14 years (60 to 72 years)
- Geriatric: 15-plus years (76-plus years)

Though this might surprise some people, AAFP notes that many cats can live well into their geriatric years, some even reaching their early twenties. Owners of geriatric cats may need to be extra diligent when caring for their felines, as cats often experience significant changes in their health and behavior as they age.

It’s important for cat owners to take their cats for routine veterinary checkups regardless of their cats’ ages, but such appointments are especially necessary for aging cats. Because cats tend to require less attention than dogs, it can be harder for cat owners to notice changes in health or behavior in aging cats than



Older cats may need additional care, but are just as worthwhile as pets.

they might notice with aging dogs. Routine vet visits can ensure that age-related health conditions don’t go undiagnosed, and such visits may even help to delay the onset of certain problems.

AAFP recommends that healthy older cats be examined by their veterinarians every six months. While that may seem frequent, six months for older cats is roughly equivalent to two years for human beings, and that’s plenty of time for cats’ health to change dramatically.

In between vet visits, cat owners can look for the following changes that cats often undergo as they age, calling their cats’ vets immediately if any of these signs appear to be having any adverse effects on the cat.

- Altered sleep-wake cycle
- Changes in vision
- Appearance of brown spots in the iris
- Decreased sense of smell
- Brittle nails
- Decreased lung reserve
- Heart or circulatory problems

- Decreased ability to digest foods and absorb nutrients
 - Loose skin
 - Reduced ability to handle stress
 - Changes in behavior or mobility
- More information about caring for aging cats is available at www.catvets.com. — Metro

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Did you know?



Animals verbalize in many different ways to communicate. One thing cat owners may notice is that cats have a tendency to meow as a form of speaking with humans. However, according to the North Shore Animal League America, cats almost never meow at other cats, as meowing is a sound generally reserved for interacting with humans. Cat owners should talk back to their cats often, as cats enjoy hearing their own names and their owners’ voices.



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